Strategic voting in a two-round, multi-candidate election

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In October 2015, in the weeks immediately before the first-round election in the Argentine presidential race, mentions of strategic voting (in Spanish, voto útil) spiked in Twitter conversations and as a Google search term for searches originating in Argentina. Supporters of Mauricio Macri, widely believed to be running in second place, were particularly visible in their appeals to strategic voting. They made the argument that voting for any other opposition candidate in the first round would give the front-runner, Peronist candidate Daniel Scioli, a large enough margin of victory to avoid a second round and win the election outright.¹ Although supporters of Mauricio Macri were visible in their appeals to strategic voting, appeals do not guarantee action, and given the complex institutional rules surrounding the election, other candidates were also in a position to potentially gain from strategic voting behavior. How many voters were in a position to vote strategically, and what types of voters were most likely to actually use their votes in a strategic fashion? The 2015 Argentine presidential election cycle, with its unique institutional rules, along with the two-wave Argentine Panel Election Study (Lupu et al. 2015), presents an excellent opportunity to answer these questions and to understand

¹ For example, one tweet said, “Before voting, think of this” and then listed all opposition candidates, saying a vote for any of them would result in a Scioli victory, but a vote for Macri would result in a ballotage. See https://twitter.com/MatiasPalotti/status/65665901463375872. The original image appears to be from a Facebook group of Macri supporters, Todos Somos Argentina.
more broadly how strategic voting responds to institutional incentives and the types of voters most likely to engage in the practice.

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The easiest way to understand a citizen’s vote in a democracy is as an expression of her sincere preference: a voter considers the competing parties or candidates and casts her ballot for the party whose policies she believes will provide her the greatest utility.\(^2\) Downs (1957), however, points out that in a system with multiple parties, “a rational voter may at times vote for a party other than the one [she] most prefers” (47, emphasis added). Voting of this form has come to be called “strategic voting.”\(^3\) Most typically, the literature conceives of strategic voters as those who choose to “vote for a second-preferred party (candidate) rather than the first-preferred one, motivated by the perception that the former has a better chance of winning the election” (Blais and Nadeau 1996: 40).\(^4\)

Scholars have provided evidence of and described the extent of strategic voting in elections in a number of long-standing democracies, including the United Kingdom (e.g. Alvarez and Nagler 2000; Alvarez, Boehmke, and Nagler 2006; Cox 1997), Canada (e.g., Blais et al. 2001; Blais, Young, and Turcotte 2005), France (Blais 2004, 2009), and Japan (Kawai and Watanabe 2013). Surprisingly, strategic voting has received far less attention in younger democracies, even though many of these countries have institutional features—including multi-party systems combined with first-past the post elections and/or high minimum thresholds for

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\(^2\) A voter might also support a candidate if she believes a party or candidate will provide her with direct payoffs or punish her if she does not vote for that candidate. Such behavior should still be understood as sincere voting, even though it may involve voting against one’s policy preferences (e.g., Stokes et al. 2013).

\(^3\) Fisher (2004) argues that the term “tactical voting” is preferable in the context of single-election studies and Kawai and Watanabe (2013) advocate for the term “misaligned voting.” In the interest of consistency with the majority of the literature, we use the standard terminology.

\(^4\) Cox (1997) provides a similar definition: “Strategic voting in a simple plurality election means voting for a [individually] lower-ranked candidate that one believes is [electorally] stronger, rather than for a higher-ranked candidate that one believes is weaker” (72). Strategic voting may also occur when voters act so as to keep small parties above electoral thresholds or to affect the composition of opposition forces (Blais et al. 2001).
representation—which are likely to encourage strategic behavior among voters.\(^5\) To our knowledge, this chapter presents the first-ever empirical estimate of strategic voting in a presidential election in Latin America.\(^6\)

The 2015 Argentine presidential elections featured multiparty competition, a compulsory open primary, and a two-round general election format, in which the possibility of a second-round depended on the outcome of the first round. These combined features of the election present a number of methodological advantages for estimating strategic voting at the individual level. In a single-round election, analysts typically identify strategic voters as those respondents for whom there is a disjuncture between sincere preferences (usually measured using a feeling thermometer) and vote intention (e.g., Blais, Young, and Turcotte 2005).\(^7\)

For the 2015 Presidential election cycle in Argentina, we can use both a feeling thermometer and self-reported vote choice from the mandatory primary held in August to get a robust estimate of each survey respondent’s true preference over the full field of candidates while using vote choice in the second-round, two-candidate election to identify respondents’ sincere preferences over the final two candidates. This allows us to identify both potential and actual strategic voters at the individual level in the first-round election.

In this chapter, we estimate the share of actual strategic voters in the population as a whole as well as their share among potential strategic voters. We use two different measures of strategic voting to generate higher and lower bounds on our estimate. We estimate that between 6 and 10 percent of the population cast strategic votes, a rate of strategic voting similar to that

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\(^5\) Poiré (2000) and Fujiwara (2011) examine strategic voting in congressional elections in Mexico and mayoral elections in Brazil, respectively; Abramson et al. (2010) examine strategic voting in Mexican legislative elections as part of a paper that examines tactical voting in seven different elections across countries.

\(^6\) Benton (2005) elaborates the logic of how institutional rules in Latin America discourage citizens from “wasting” votes on smaller parties in her analysis of presidential voting in the region, but she does not directly estimate the share of strategic votes in any election.

\(^7\) In some cases, scholars also ask respondents to assess the electoral chances of different candidates.
uncovered in countries with first-past-the-post electoral systems, like Canada and the United Kingdom, where estimates generally hover between about 3 and 9 percent. Further, we estimate that about half of all voters who, by dint of their preferences, could have voted strategically, actually did so. In the final section of the chapter, we test hypotheses about individual-level characteristics that we expect to correlate with strategic voting behavior and find strongest support for the claim that attitudes towards major party candidates explain the propensity to vote strategically; we find less evidence that characteristics such as socio-economic status, education, or political knowledge consistently predict strategic voting.

**Defining and Measuring Strategic Voting**

Following Blais and colleagues, we define a strategic vote as “a vote for a party (candidate) that is not the preferred one, motivated by the intention to affect the outcome of the election” (Blais et al. 2001, 344; see also Fisher 2004). The final clause of their definition highlights the idea that strategic voting is, in fact, strategic (i.e., it is done to obtain the maximum utility given both the voter’s preferences and her beliefs about the electoral environment). Two-candidate, first-past-the-post elections (like run-off elections for executive offices in Latin America) do not offer an opportunity for strategic voting: voters should cast a ballot based on their sincere preferences between the two candidates. In contrast, multi-party, first-past-the-post elections, like those for legislative office in the United Kingdom, regularly create the possibility that some voters will cast their ballots strategically, and these are the cases that have received the vast majority of scholarly attention on the subject (e.g., Alvarez and Nagler 2000; Blais et al.

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8 Fisher uses the term “tactical” voting but defines it in much the same manner.
9 Note that even in electoral contests where two candidates overwhelmingly dominate, as with most U.S. presidential elections, the presence of a third party candidate creates the possibility that some voters will act strategically (e.g., Burden 2005).
2001; Blais and Nadeau 1996). In these cases, a voter is a potential strategic voter when she believes that her most preferred candidate is unlikely to win the election. In such a scenario, scholars have established that some citizens shift their support from their truly most preferred candidate to another candidate out of a desire to not “waste” their vote and to possibly exert some influence over the outcome between the most likely top-two finishers. Citizens who actually shift their behavior in this way are understood as strategic voters.

Interestingly, the possibility of strategic voting in elections with two rounds has received little scholarly attention. Cox (1997) briefly considers the possibility and argues that voters may act strategically in two-round elections, though perhaps not “as often as they do under plurality” (Cox 1997, 137), while Blais (2004) estimates that nearly 10 percent of the French electorate voted strategically in the first round of the 2002 presidential election. Latin America’s democracies provide a rich context for exploring further the possibility of strategic voting in two-round elections. Two-round elections are quite common throughout the region; most countries employ this format in elections for executive office. At the presidential level, nearly every country in Latin America has a two-round system, with most constitutions

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10 Abramson et al. (2010) compare rates of strategic voting in proportional representation versus plurality-rule systems and find that the dynamics of strategic voting are similar in both types of systems—voters are most likely to desert smaller parties. Because proportional representation systems have more small parties, they actually find higher rates of strategic voting in elections within such systems.

11 For an exception to this definition, see Kawai and Watanabe (2013), who define strategic voters as those voters who condition their votes on the probability of being pivotal. Under this definition, strategic voters frequently will vote their sincere preferences. The authors use the term “misaligned voters” to describe those who condition their votes on the probability of being pivotal and vote for some party other than their most-preferred party.

12 Formal models of strategic voting have also typically focused on single-round plurality rule elections; see for example Kselman and Niou (2010).

13 Blais finds that, in contrast to the dominant mode of strategic voting wherein voters abandon weaker candidates (which we examine here), the 2002 French election was defined by a large number of voters who, despite their preference for one of the top two candidates, strategically cast ballots for a weaker candidate in the first-round election in order to signal an interest in the policies preferred by those candidates. Blais attributes the surprise ascent of Jean-Marie Le Pen to the second round of the election to this behavior and notes that this type of strategic voting may be unusual.

14 The major exception is Mexico, where presidential elections are single-round plurality rule.
mandating a second round if no candidate receives more than 50 percent of the vote. Similar structures are sometimes found in gubernatorial elections (e.g., in Brazil and some Argentine provinces) and even at the municipal level (e.g., in Brazil).

A two-round election presents a number of opportunities for strategic behavior. When a second round is mandated, supporters of any candidate running lower than third in the polls face strong incentives to shift their votes to a candidate with a better chance of advancing to the second round. For instance, imagine a voter in the first round of a potential two-round election where four candidates compete in the first round and the top-two candidates will advance to a second round. The voter prefers candidate D most, followed by C, B, and A. Assume that the voter’s beliefs about the likely outcome of the first round are as follows: she believes that A will obtain the most votes, followed by B, C, and D. As the voter’s most-preferred candidate is unlikely to advance to the second round, she has an incentive to vote for candidate C in the hope of being pivotal in helping candidate C advance to the second round to compete against candidate A.

The possibilities for strategic behavior become more complex when, as was the case in the 2015 Argentine presidential election, a second-round only occurs if the outcome of the first-round election is sufficiently “close” (with the exact definition of closeness depending on the institutional rules in force). In this context, a supporter of a likely third-place finisher who has a

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15 This is the case in Peru, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Uruguay; Argentina, Bolivia, and Ecuador have more complex rules, described below.
16 In one of the few studies to explore strategic voting in a system with two-round elections and multiple parties, Fujiwara (2011) shows that strategic voting occurs in both single-round and two-round municipal elections in Brazil in a manner consistent with theoretical predictions. He finds that in single-ballot elections, voters coalesce around two candidates with third-place-and-below finishers receiving relatively few votes, whereas in the first round of two-round elections, voters coalesce around three candidates, given the opportunity for voters to push a candidate who might otherwise be eliminated into the second round.
17 This possibility was first suggested by Duverger (1951, 269-270) and elaborated on by Cox (1997).
18 The Argentine system mandates a second round (also known as a ballotage) unless a candidate receives either 45 percent of the vote or 40 percent of the vote and defeats all other candidates by more than a 10 percentage point
strong preference over the likely top two finishers may consider how her vote will affect the probability that a second round occurs at all. This will be true of supporters of all lower-ranked candidates, as well. For example, consider a voter who supports candidate C, followed by B, A, and D. As before, she believes that A will obtain the most votes in round one, followed by B, C, and D. If she believes that A may win by a large enough margin to avert a second round, a supporter of candidate C may vote strategically for candidate B in the first round. On the other hand, if she believes no candidate will win enough support to avert a second round, she will vote sincerely in the first round, throwing her support behind candidate B only if a second round occurs.

Who Should Vote Strategically?

When the institutional setting creates the opportunity for strategic voting, which voters are most likely to actually cast their ballots strategically? As already described, this depends, in the very first instance, on a voter’s preferences and her beliefs about the likely outcome of the election. A voter who genuinely prefers a likely first or second-place finisher has no incentives to vote in a strategic fashion. Among those voters who genuinely prefer candidates with lesser prospects for direct election or advancement to a second round, the intensity of preferences across all of the choices will affect the likelihood of strategic voting. For example, the stronger

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It is also possible that supporters of the two leading candidates will vote strategically in the first round of a two-round election, perhaps supporting a third candidate who would be a weaker opponent in the second round. We consider this highly unlikely because, if enough supporters of a front-runner act in this fashion, this would push their most-preferred candidate out of the top position. We view strategic voting that requires such a high degree of coordination around different strategies as highly unlikely. In the other types of strategic voting we describe, individuals would want all others with identical preferences to also act in the same way. Consistent with our expectations, we find almost no evidence of behavior that might be construed as strategic on the part of supporters of the front-runner (Scioli) in the 2015 Argentine election. Among respondents who voted for Scioli in the primary, less than 1% shifted their vote choice in the first-round general election to the weaker of Scioli’s major opponents (Massa).
an individual’s antipathy towards one of the likely top-two finishers, or the greater the gap in her affinity towards these top two finishers, the greater the likelihood that she will use her vote strategically in an attempt to maximize the more-preferred candidate’s probability of victory (Blais and Nadeau 1996; Fisher 2004). As we show below, evidence from the 2015 Argentine presidential election is consistent with the theoretical expectation that a voter’s preferences over candidates other than her own most preferred candidate help explain whether she opts to cast her ballot in a strategic fashion.20

Holding constant preferences, we also consider the possibility that other individual-level characteristics are associated with the likelihood of strategic voting. Strategic voting requires a somewhat complex calculus on the part of the voter. A strategic voter must not only have a single most preferred candidate but also a rank-ordered preference over other candidates in the race. In addition, depending on the complexity of electoral rules, she must have a fairly nuanced understanding of how, at the margins, her vote could affect the prospects that different candidates advance to a further electoral stage or ultimately win office. Finally, she must be sufficiently attentive to the media and other sources of political information to know which candidates are most likely to win the election and/or advance to a second round and to locate a variety of candidates according to their electoral prospects. For all these reasons, we believe that politically sophisticated citizens are more likely to act strategically than otherwise similar citizens.21 Political sophisticates are the most likely to have the high levels of cognitive capacity and political engagement that enable them to act strategically.

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20 The perceived or actual closeness of the election itself may also affect strategic voting (Blais and Nadeau 1996). As we examine only a single election and do not have data on respondents’ perceptions of the closeness of the race, we cannot examine this factor here.

21 In the existing literature, political sophistication is generally understood as a “bundle” concept (Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991), one that combines elements of political knowledge, interest, and cognitive sophistication. See also the discussion in Gomez and Wilson (2007).
We also consider the possibility that a voter’s general attitude towards risk and/or her specific views on strategic voting may be associated with the likelihood of acting strategically. With respect to risk, we expect that individuals who are risk averse will be less comfortable “wasting” a vote on a candidate with little chance of victory; these individuals will also want to minimize the possibility of a victory by a strongly disliked candidate. For these reasons, we expect risk-averse individuals to be more likely to cast a strategic ballot as compared to others.\textsuperscript{22}

The APES survey also included a direct question that asked respondents whether they agreed with the statement that voters should sometimes vote for a less preferred candidate when that candidate has a greater possibility of victory. We expect that individuals who express agreement with this statement should be more likely to act strategically if given the opportunity.

**Incentives for Strategic Voting in the 2015 Argentine Presidential Election**

How widespread was strategic voting in the 2015 Argentine Presidential election and what types of voters engaged in it?\textsuperscript{23} As noted elsewhere in the volume, these elections marked the end of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner’s second term in office and, counting from her husband Néstor Kirchner’s election in 2003, of more than a decade of Kirchner leadership in Argentina. The presidential election season was made up of three separate elections which took place over the course of four months: a primary (PASO), a first-round, and a run-off. We focus on how the political environment, combined with this electoral structure, affected incentives for strategic voting.

\textsuperscript{22} On the other hand, it might be the case that risk-seeking individuals are more comfortable departing from their typical (sincere) voting behavior. Ultimately, we find no evidence of any systematic link between a respondent’s (self-assessed) risk aversion and her behavior. Future work should explore more robust measures of risk aversion before dismissing the possibility of a link between risk aversion and the propensity to vote strategically in an election.

\textsuperscript{23} See Calvo (this volume) for some discussion of the role of strategic voting in the PASO and first-round election for governor of the province of Buenos Aires.
The first election was the August 9th open, obligatory primary election (*Primarias Abiertas Simultáneas y Obligatorias*—PASO). In these elections, all alliances running candidates for the presidency were required to have simultaneous primaries with voting mandatory for citizens between the ages of 18 and 69. Under the institutional rules governing the PASO, citizens can only support one candidate, but that candidate can be in any party or alliance (that is, voters are not restricted to participating in their own party primary). Any alliance that overall receives more than 1.5 percent of the vote in the primaries has its top finisher advance to the first-round general election.24

For our analytical purposes, the PASO serves two roles. First, it usefully provides information to the public about the relative standing of candidates, information that potential strategic voters could use to determine their votes during the October (first) round of the general election (see also Calvo, this volume). The PASO results are particularly useful to voters in light of the uneven and often highly partisan nature of public opinion polling in Argentina. In addition, as we explain below, we use vote intention for the PASO, in conjunction with feeling thermometer ratings of the candidates, to measure genuine preferences across candidates at the individual level among APES survey respondents.

In 2015, the top three candidates in the PASO were Daniel Scioli, representing Fernández’s *Frente para la Victoria* (Front for Victory—FPV) faction within the Peronist party; Mauricio Macri, the mayor of the city of Buenos Aires and the leader of the center-right *Propuesta Republicana* (Republican Proposal—PRO) party; and Sergio Massa, a Peronist and former mayor and cabinet official in the Kirchner administration who had broken with the administration and ran on the new *Unidos por una Nueva Alternativa* (United for a New

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24 The law establishing open, obligatory primaries was passed in 2009, but it didn’t enter into effect until 2011, when the PASO was held for the first time for a presidential election. Calvo (this volume) presents more details on the PASO and the political factors that led to its implementation.
Alternative—UNA) label. Scioli, vice-president under Nestor Kirchner and then governor of Buenos Aires province, was the sole candidate running on the FPV ticket, whereas Macri faced two competitors within the Cambiemos (Let’s Change) coalition, and Massa faced one other candidate within his coalition. Both Macri and Massa were heavily favored within their coalitions; Macri won 80 percent of the Cambiemos vote, while Massa won 70 percent of the UNA vote. Alongside these three candidates, three other candidates from minor parties/alliances also surpassed the necessary threshold and advanced to the first-round election on October 25.\textsuperscript{25}

Argentine electoral rules for the presidential election state that the winner of the first-round election wins outright if he or she receives more than 45 percent of the vote or, alternately, if he/she receives at least 40 percent of the vote and also surpasses the second-place finisher by more than 10 percentage points. We treat the October 2015, first-round election as the principal potential moment for strategic voting in the presidential election. The second-round November election, with only two candidates, by definition offered no opportunity for strategic voting. Although we cannot rule out entirely the possibility of strategic voting during the August primaries, we believe there are a number of reasons why strategic behavior should be limited. Recall that the primary is used within each coalition to determine which candidate will advance to the general election. In that sense, we can think of the primary as similar to a single-round election. Any voter who supports a candidate in an alliance running two candidates has a clear incentive to vote sincerely for her favored candidate. If she acts as if she were the pivotal voter within her alliance, voting sincerely is clearly her utility-maximizing strategy. This then should describe the behavior of supporters of Sergio Massa and his single competitor in the UNA

\textsuperscript{25} Calvo (this volume, Table 3.2) presents complete results for the top three slates.
alliance, José Manual de la Sota. Supporters of candidates running in alliances of three or more candidates might face slightly different incentives. Echoing the dynamics of a single-round, three-candidate general election, supporters of a likely third-place finisher within an alliance who prefer one of the other two candidates in their alliance might shift their support to one of the more electorally viable candidates in the hope of swinging the outcome. While theoretically possible, we view this behavior as unlikely in the 2015 Argentine presidential race. The only alliance with three candidates in the primary was Macri’s Cambiemos alliance, an alliance that Macri dominated from the outset, with the other two candidates (Ernesto Sanz and Elisa Carrió) clearly lagging significantly behind him with no reasonable chance of advancing to the general election. (These candidates receive 3.3 and 2.3 percent, respectively, of the vote in the primary.)

This then leaves only supporters of candidates who ran unopposed in their alliances as potentially strategic voters in the August primary election. Foremost among them are supporters of the FPV’s chosen candidate, Daniel Scioli, who ran unopposed in his alliance and received 39 percent of the total votes cast. Theoretically, supporters of a sole representative of an alliance, knowing their candidate will advance to the general election, might vote strategically in the hopes of selecting the weakest opponent for their candidate in the general election. Empirically, however, we again view this as unlikely in the case of the 2015 Argentine election. As previously noted, the leading opponents to Scioli were Sergio Massa and Mauricio Macri, and their support within their alliances vastly outpaced that of their internal opponents. Supporters of Scioli might have correctly recognized that other alliance members would have made for easier rivals for Scioli. At the same time, these potentially “easier” rivals lagged so far behind the

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26 This logic also explains why we should see only sincere voting among supporters of the small leftist alliance, Frente de Izquierda y de los Trabajadores (Workers’ Left Front). This alliance won 3.25% of the votes cast in the primary, split almost evenly between its two candidates.

27 The only other candidates running unopposed came from small alliances or parties where the risk of not surpassing the minimum threshold to advance to a general election was real. This risk should ensure sincere voting among these candidates’ supporters.
leading names in their alliances that, unless there had been a massive, coordinated effort among Scioli supporters to shift to these individuals, they could not have reasonably expected to sway the outcome.28

Our intuition that any strategic voting in the August 2015 primary should have been very limited, for both theoretical reasons and as a result of the particular configuration of candidates and alliances who competed in this election, is also supported empirically by a variety of online measures of interest in the topic of strategic voting. These measures support the claim that any strategic voting that took place in the 2015 Argentine election was centered around the October 25th first-round general election, rather than the August primary. In popular discourse in Argentina, strategic voting is known as *voto útil* or, literally, a “useful vote.” Internet searches for this term, media coverage of the phenomenon, and candidate exhortations to their supporters to employ the *voto útil* all peaked right before the October 25th first-round election. On Twitter, for example, there were over 1,300 tweets that mentioned the *voto útil* in the context of the Argentine election during the month of October, in contrast with fewer than 150 such tweets in August, the month of the primary elections.29 Internet searches show a similar trend. Below, Figure 9.1 shows internet searches for the term *voto útil* conducted on Google in Argentina over the course of 2015.30 As the figure shows, after a very low baseline level of searches in the first half of the year, there was some increase in internet searches for the term from June to

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28 Data on online searches and the use of the Spanish term for strategic voting on Twitter offer no evidence that any such coordinated effort took place. In addition, of course, if Scioli supporters shifted their votes en masse in an attempt to bolster a weak successor, they could have endangered Scioli’s chances of meeting the minimum threshold to advance. We also look for empirical evidence of behavior of this type by looking at the preferences and intended vote in the PASO from the first wave of the APES survey: we find extremely few respondents whose behavior could be construed as strategic.

29 These figures are based on a non-geographically restricted search in Twitter for *voto útil* and any of Macri, Massa, or Scioli.

30 Note that Google Trends figures do not display the absolute volume of search activity for a term, but rather takes the highest search activity as 100 and then illustrates how search activity varies over time in comparison to this maximum. The figure also reveals a very small increase in searches for *voto útil* surrounding the August primary, but it appears to only have occurred in the capital city and the province of Buenos Aires (the only two provinces where Google received a sufficient number of searches to track them in August).
September, followed by a marked peak in interest in the weeks leading up to the October 25\textsuperscript{th} election.

**Figure 9.1:** Google Searches for *Voto Útil* in Argentina, 2015

Consistent with the surge in popular interest in strategic voting as identified in online searches, newspaper coverage of the *voto útil* also increased markedly in the run-up to the October first-round election. *La Nación*, for example, published 71 articles that included the term *voto útil* between October 1\textsuperscript{st} and October 31\textsuperscript{st} 2015, in contrast to only 16 such articles in the month of August. Indeed, one sign of the breadth of attention to the possibility of strategic voting was that Scioli, who clearly stood to lose from strategic voting, actually tried to employ the language of strategic voting in his favor. The week before the October first-round election, Scioli, using the double meaning of the term “strategic/useful vote” in Spanish, told supporters that they should seek out the true *voto útil*—which, in his words, was a vote in favor of Argentine employment, rather than “against” anything.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{31} In Spanish, “vayan a buscar el verdadero voto útil.” These comments were covered widely in the press, for example here: http://www.ambito.com/812310-scioli-vayan-a-buscar-el-verdadero-voto-util. They also seem to have been picked up by many Scioli supporters on social media.
How might we expect strategic voting to work in this electoral environment? As described above, incentives to vote strategically depend both on institutional rules and citizens’ preference ordering over the available candidates. At the time of the first-round election, there were three major candidates—Scioli, Macri, and Massa (listed in descending order of the vote total each received in the August open primaries)—plus three minor candidates. Given Argentina’s electoral rules, which do not mandate a second-round election, supporters of Scioli, the front-runner, faced strong incentives to vote sincerely. As Calvo states in this volume, “Scioli’s goal was to win the presidency in the first round.” Scioli had won 39 percent of the total vote in the PASO and a number of other candidates had significant strength; this means his supporters could have reasonably believed that Scioli’s goal was within reach. He could win the election outright in the first round either by increasing his support to win 45 percent of the first-round vote or by receiving more than 40 percent and placing more than ten percentage points above any other candidate.

What about supporters of other candidates? We begin by considering Macri supporters. The results of the PASO, where Macri’s Cambiemos coalition won 30 percent of the vote, suggested that Macri was the most likely second-place finisher in the first-round election. Thus, Macri supporters (including voters who supported other candidates within his coalition in the August primary, who we pool with Macri supporters for our empirical analysis), much like Scioli supporters, faced clear incentives to vote sincerely and support their most preferred candidate in the first-round election.

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Supporters of Sergio Massa, who was expected to place third, faced different incentives than supporters of the two front-runners. If institutional rules mandated a second-round election, then Massa supporters would have faced clear incentives to vote sincerely in the first round; they could always shift their support to their second-choice candidate in the run-off. However, the combination of electoral rules and the vote margins achieved in the open primaries made it unclear whether a second round would occur or whether Scioli would obtain sufficient support to win an outright victory in the first round. Thus, Massa voters had the possibility of using their votes in a strategic fashion in the first-round election.

Recall that Massa had previously served in the Fernández administration but then later broke with the government. We thus consider the possibility of strategic voting by two different types of Massa supporters: those who viewed Macri as their second-choice candidate, and those who viewed Scioli as their second-choice candidate. Starting with the former, voters who wanted to avoid a Scioli victory could have acted strategically by shifting their support to Macri in the October election. This potential shift of Massa supporters to Macri—based on a strong desire to block a Scioli victory—was frequently referenced in the news media in the period leading up to the first-round vote, where many sources framed the election as a referendum on the Kirchner government. What about Massa supporters who considered Scioli their second choice candidate? Given the consensus that Scioli would definitely advance to a second round (if he did not win outright in the first round), these Massa supporters had more limited incentives to act strategically as compared to Massa supporters whose second choice was Macri. At the same time, the contingent nature of the second round left open some space for strategic behavior. That is, Massa supporters who preferred Scioli to Macri may have feared that, although Scioli would

win the plurality of votes in the first round, he would lose in a second round that allowed his opponents to unite (which, of course, is what ultimately happened). In light of this possibility, some Massa supporters may have shifted their support to Scioli in the first round in the hopes of assuring an outright victory for their second-choice candidate.

Strategic defections to both Macri and Scioli were also open to any supporter of the various minor party candidates who ran in the October first-round general election. For any strategic behavior to take place, a voter who genuinely prefers a lower-ranked candidate must have some preference ordering over the two front-runners. In the context of this election, a Massa or minor-candidate supporter who was truly indifferent between Macri and Scioli would vote sincerely in the first round. If her preferred candidate did not advance to the ballotage, such voters are likely to opt out entirely of the second round.34 Among APES respondents who supported minor-party candidates, an overwhelming majority of Del Cano voters (28 out of 29) and a substantial minority of Stolbizer voters (6 out of 17) reported not voting or casting a blank or null ballot in the November run-off. By definition, these respondents are excluded from our estimates of potential and actual strategic voters. In contrast, the vast majority of October Massa voters (98 out of the 101 in our sample) chose to cast a valid vote in the November run-off. As we show empirically below, APES respondents who supported Massa or other minor candidates in the primary and who ultimately did cast a valid vote in the November run-off were much more likely to defect to Macri than to Scioli in the first round. This is consistent with the dominant characterization of strategic voting in the Argentine press during the election period.

34 Alternately, an individual might randomly cast her ballot for one of the two remaining candidates. Given that Argentine voters can go to the polls (a legal obligation) and then cast a blank or spoiled ballot, we consider it much more likely that voters who cast a valid vote for either Macri or Scioli in November had a genuine (if perhaps small) preference for the candidate for whom they voted.
Data and Measurement

To measure strategic voting and its individual-level correlates, we use data from the second wave of the 2015 Argentine Panel Election Survey. Given the electoral scenario described above, only some voters in the election had the possibility of voting strategically: genuine supporters of a candidate other than Scioli or Macri who also had a preference over these two candidates. How do we identify these possible strategic voters and assess whether they acted strategically?

Measuring Genuine Preferences

To understand if a voter has acted strategically, we need an estimate of a voter’s “true” preferences over the candidates in a race—only once we know these can we assess if her actual voting behavior in the October first-round election deviated from this preference in a way we can label strategic. The second-round election pitted only two candidates against each other, so there is no way for citizens to act strategically in this context. We therefore treat reported vote in the second round as a genuine expression of preference between Macri and Scioli, the candidates who competed in this round (assuming, of course, that survey respondents report their votes accurately).

Estimating genuine preferences over the other candidates is less straightforward. Many studies use feeling thermometers or other self-reports of preferences over candidates to identify as strategic a citizen who reports that she intends to vote for a candidate other than the one who is most-preferred according to her feeling thermometer ranking. Where feeling thermometer questions are asked simultaneously with question about vote intent, we risk underestimating

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35 As noted above, if a respondent cast a valid vote for either Scioli or Macri in November, we treat this as evidence that she had a rank-ordered preference (however small) over the two candidates.
strategic behavior, as some voters, once they have decided to vote in a strategic fashion, might shift their reported preferences to be consistent with that behavior.\textsuperscript{36}

The three-round nature of the 2015 Argentine election yields the methodological advantage of making available a self-reported behavioral measure of each respondents’ top choice among the full set of candidates—their vote choice in the August primary election. We use a respondent’s reported primary vote as our main measure of her genuinely most preferred candidate. To incorporate the largest possible sample of respondents in our analysis, we rely on respondents’ recollection of voting in the primary from the second wave of the APES survey.

The main disadvantage of this behavioral measure is that it assesses preferences at the time of the primary (late August). To the extent a voter’s preferences changed over the course of the campaign between the primary and the first round on October 25\textsuperscript{th}—for example, if a supporter of a minor candidate shifted her sincere preferences to either Macri or Scioli—then our behavioral measure of an individual’s most preferred candidate may overestimate strategic voting. For this reason, as a robustness check, we also use an alternate, more restrictive measure of voter preferences. For this second measure, we identify a voter as having a true preference for a candidate only if she both reports having voted for that candidate in the primary and also gives that candidate her (weakly) highest score on a feeling thermometer. Once again, to maximize the number of respondents, we use data from the second-wave survey.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{36} Alvarez and Nagler (2000) cite similar concerns with the self-reporting of voting behavior. They argue for the superiority of separately predicting sincere and strategic votes based on voter and party issue positions and analyzing the frequency with which the two diverge.

\textsuperscript{37} The second wave survey was conducted only after the November runoff, making this a quite stringent measure, as it only captures voters whose most preferred candidate at the time of the primary remains unchanged to the time of the runoff. Ideally, we would have measured preferences at the time of the October election, but unfortunately no such measure is available.
Potential and Actual Strategic Voters

Once we identify voter preferences, we can then identify which voters had the option of strategic behavior available to them. We treat respondents who voted for a candidate other than Macri or Scioli in the primary as potentially strategic voters. This describes about 30 percent of the electorate, and 20 percent of respondents in the APES survey. Among this universe of potential strategic voters, we consider those who actually switched their support to one of the two leading candidates in the October election (either Macri or Scioli) as actual strategic voters.

Results

The Share of Potential and Actual Strategic Voters

For the purposes of our analysis, we consider only those respondents who reported a valid vote in all of the primary, first-round, and second-round elections. Among those respondents, we identify about 18 percent as potentially strategic voters: these respondents reported voting for Massa or a more minor party candidate in the primary and then switching their support to either Macri or Scioli in the November runoff. Of those who could have voted strategically according to these criteria, a fairly large proportion appears to have done so. In fact,

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38 A small number of respondents reported voting for the two other candidates running on Macri’s Cambiemos alliance or for the other candidate running on Massa’s UNA alliance in the primary. For the purposes of estimating strategic voting, we treat these voters as either Macri or Massa voters. That is, we assume that they would shift their support to the leading candidate from their ticket for genuine, not strategic, reasons. They are not counted towards our total estimate of potential strategic voters.

39 This difference is mostly due to the overrepresentation of Scioli supporters in the APES sample. In the primary election itself, Scioli received about 39% of the valid votes cast, whereas nearly 52% of APES respondents who reported voting for a candidate in the primary reported voting for Scioli.

40 In an ideal world, we would also have had a measure of a respondent’s belief about the likely outcome of the first-round election. This would enable us to distinguish between respondents who switched to Macri because of a belief that he had the greatest likelihood of averting a first-round Scioli victory and those who switched to Macri for other reasons.

41 This corresponds to 198 out of 1,106 respondents who reported valid votes in all three elections. Using survey weights to obtain a population estimate suggests a slightly larger pool of potential strategic voters, 18.5 percent of the population as compared to 17.9 percent of the survey sample.
more than half—55 percent—of respondents who supported minor candidates in the primary and who also reported voting in the second round had already switched to the candidate for whom they voted in the second round in the first-round election. This corresponds to about 10 percent of the respondents in the APES sample. These numbers are roughly similar, or slightly higher, than those reported by scholars who have examined strategic voting in other contexts. In various Canadian elections, Blais and his coauthors (1996; 2001; 2005) estimate that between 3 and 6 percent of all voters acted strategically in any given election. In the United Kingdom, estimates range from about 4 to 9 percent (Alvarez and Nagler 2000; Fisher 2004). Among scholars who estimate the share of potential strategic voters who actually acted in that fashion, our estimate of about 50 percent in Argentina is also broadly similar with estimates from elsewhere. Other scholars estimate that as few as about 30 percent of potential strategic voters actually acted strategically in the 1988 Canadian elections (Blais and Nadeau 1996; Kselman and Niou 2010) to as many as 64 percent in the 1997 U.K. elections (Alvarez, Boehmke, and Nagler 2006). In the 2015 Argentine election, the bulk of the potential and actual strategic voters we identify—about 70 percent—came from eventual supporters of Mauricio Macri’s candidacy.

As a robustness check, we re-estimate the share of potential and actual strategic voters in the sample using a more restrictive rule for identifying potential strategic voters. Here, we treat a voter as potentially strategic only if she voted for Massa or a minor party candidate and that same candidate is also her (weakly) most preferred candidate according to the feeling.

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42 Given that APES survey respondents report lesser support for Massa and other minor party candidates in the primary as compared to the actual outcome, and that Macri and Scioli supporters cannot, by definition, be strategic voters, these numbers, if anything, underestimate the share of potential and actual strategic voters in the population. Using survey weights to obtain a population estimate increases the estimated proportion of strategic voters by a quarter of a percentage point.

43 In a study of strategic voting in Japan, Kawai and Watanabe (2013) find a somewhat lower rate of strategic voting, estimating it falls between 1.4% and 4.2%.

44 Although switchers to Scioli were a small percentage of respondents, a similar percent of potential strategic voters for both Scioli and Macri were labeled actual strategic voters (about 55% in both cases).
thermometer scores recorded in the survey. Feeling thermometer scores were collected in wave 2, after the campaign was completed, and so if a respondent meets these two criteria, we can be quite confident that if she switched her vote to either Macri or Scioli during the October election, this was the result of a strategic calculus, rather than simply a change in preferences.\textsuperscript{45} APES did not elicit respondents’ feeling thermometer assessments for candidates who did not advance out of the primaries, and so we drop from the sample respondents who cast their primary ballot for either De la Sota or Altamira.

Using this more restrictive definition, we identify a smaller number of potential and actual strategic voters in the survey: 98 who, given their preferences, could have shifted strategically to Macri and 39 who could have shifted to Scioli, for a total of about 12 percent of the sample that reported valid votes at all three stages of the election. Among this group of potential strategic voters, slightly fewer than half (a total 64 voters or just under 6 percent of the sample) actually departed from their true preference and cast a ballot for either Macri or Scioli in the first round of the election.

\textit{The Correlates of Strategic Voting}

The possibility of strategic voting is determined by a respondent’s preferences and will vary across elections. But are there underlying factors that might explain which voters—among potential strategic voters—actually act strategically? As noted above, the existing literature on strategic voting has placed much greater emphasis on estimating the rate of strategic voting in different partisan and institutional arrangements than on estimating the individual correlates of

\textsuperscript{45} In fact, given the timing of the second-wave survey after the November runoff election, this definition may be too restrictive, as voters who strategically defected to Macri or Scioli in October may have come to prefer that candidate by November. Unfortunately, we have no measure of preferences at the time of the October election.
strategic behavior.\textsuperscript{46} Here, we test one explanation for strategic voting from the literature—that a voter is more likely to act strategically the larger the gap in her affinity for the likely top two finishers (Blais and Nadeau 1996).\textsuperscript{47} As described above, we also explore the possibility that politically sophisticated voters, risk-averse voters, and those who say that strategic voting is acceptable are more likely to actually act strategically.

To measure a respondent’s affinity for the top two finishers, we use responses to a feeling thermometer question from the second wave survey that asked respondents to rate candidates on a scale from 0 to 10.\textsuperscript{48} For respondents who voted for Macri in the November run-off, we subtract a respondent’s rating for Scioli from her evaluation of Macri; for Scioli voters, we do the opposite. For each respondent, then, a higher number on the feeling thermometer “difference” indicates a more substantial preference for the candidate she ultimately supported over that candidate’s main competitor.\textsuperscript{49} To measure political sophistication, we employ a measure of self-reported education (on a 0-5 scale) and a measure of political knowledge that reflects the total number of correct answers a respondent provided to three political knowledge questions included in the second-wave APES survey (and hence ranges from 0 to 3).

Respondents in the second wave of the APES were also asked whether they preferred to take

\textsuperscript{46} Eggers and Vivyan (2016) is a recent exception that also explores individual-level correlates of strategic voting. They find that in recent British elections, strategic voting is more prevalent among higher-income voters, female voters, and left-leaning voters, but they find no differences based on education or age. We find no significant difference for socio-economic status (as reported below) or gender or age (not reported). 

\textsuperscript{47} Similarly, Fisher (2004) argues that more intense distaste for the likely first-place finisher increases the likelihood of strategic voting.

\textsuperscript{48} We also explored whether direct antipathy towards a candidate is associated with strategic voting, as suggested by Fisher (2004). We find that among potential strategic voters who ultimately supported Macri, greater antipathy for Scioli is associated with a greater likelihood of defecting to Macri in the October first-round election. Among the smaller group of potential strategic voters who ultimately supported Scioli, antipathy toward Macri does not significantly vary between those who voted for Scioli in October or waited until November to support him. These results are not reported.

\textsuperscript{49} For supporters of both candidates, these variables run from -6 to 10. This indicates that in a few cases, respondents who ultimately supported Macri (Scioli) in fact reported a higher feeling thermometer score for the other candidate. In the case of Macri supporters, this describes just 5 out of 141 potential strategic voters. In the case of Scioli voters, a more substantial 13 out of 57 potentially strategic voters report higher levels of positive feeling towards Macri. This may in part be a result of the fact that these feeling thermometer assessments were collected after Macri had won the presidency.
risks, avoid risks to the extent possible, or were indifferent between the two. We treat as risk averse those respondents who replied that they preferred to avoid taking risks; about 43 percent of respondents fall into this category.\footnote{See the appendix to this volume for more details on the construction of these variables.} Finally, we included in the second wave an explicit question that elicited respondents’ attitudes towards strategic voting. Respondents were asked whether they agreed more with the statement that “one should always vote for the candidate you prefer more” or “sometimes one should vote for a candidate that is not your preferred candidate, but has a better chance of winning.” We code the 16 percent of respondents who agreed with the latter as viewing strategic voting as acceptable.\footnote{In Spanish, the question read as follows: “Con cuál de las siguientes frases está Ud. más de acuerdo? ¿Uno siempre debe votar por el candidato que más prefiere o a veces uno debe votar por un candidato que no es su candidato preferido, pero que tiene mejores chances de ganar?” In future work, we might change the wording of the question slightly, so that the second statement asks respondents whether one could (rather than should) act strategically (in Spanish, replacing debe with puede).}

We test our hypotheses by examining the correlates of actually acting strategically among the set of potential strategic voters. We present results separately for those potentially strategic voters who shifted to Macri in R2 and those who shifted to Scioli in R2, first in a series of simple difference-in-means tests and then in a regression framework.

Figure 9.2 focuses on genuine supporters of Massa or any minor party candidate who ultimately voted for Macri. It compares the values of a variety of predictors for potential strategic voters who did not act strategically against those voters who actually acted strategically. The left column uses our baseline definition of strategic voters, where vote choice in the primary serves as our measure of genuine preference. The right column uses the stricter definition, which requires that both primary vote choice and feeling thermometers match. For each variable, the figure shows the mean and 95 percent confidence interval for actual strategic voters (above) and potential strategic voters who did not vote strategically (below). P-values for the difference are reported in the upper right-hand corner of each plot. The results displayed in Figure 9.2 show
strong support for the hypothesis that the greater the difference in a respondent’s affinity for the
two leading candidates, the more likely she is to act strategically. Among the respondents who
eventually switched from Massa or another candidate in the primary to Macri in the November
ballotage, those who switched their vote choice in the first round of the general election had a
greater gap in their evaluations of Macri versus Scioli when compared to those who continued to
vote their sincere preference in the first round. In contrast, we find little evidence in favor of
other explanations of strategic voting. There is absolutely no difference in SES, risk aversion,
or stated willingness to act strategically between potential and actual strategic voters. Results for
our proxies for political sophistication are somewhat mixed. Actual strategic voters appear to be
somewhat more educated (as we would expect) but somewhat less politically knowledgeable
(contrary to expectations) when compared to potential strategic voters. As we report below,
when included in a regression framework, these results maintain the same directionality but are
not statistically significant.

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52 We also find no differences based on age or gender (results not reported).
Figure 9.2: Comparing Potential and Actual Strategic Voters for Macri

R1 Strategic Voting Among R2 Macri Voters

Baseline Definition

- Socio-Economic Status
  - Potential: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
  - Actual: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
  - P < 0.89

- Education
  - Potential: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
  - Actual: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
  - P < 0.25

- Political Knowledge
  - Potential: 0.3, 0.5, 1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5, 3.0
  - Actual: 0.0, 0.5, 1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5, 3.0
  - P < 0.14

- Risk Aversion
  - Potential: 0.3, 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.8, 1.0
  - Actual: 0.0, 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.8, 1.0
  - P < 0.86

- Strategic Voting Acceptable (0/1)
  - Potential: 0.3, 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.8, 1.0
  - Actual: 0.0, 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.8, 1.0
  - P < 0.45

- Difference in Feeling Thermometers
  - Potential: -5, 0, 5, 10
  - Actual: -5, 0, 5, 10
  - P < 0.0031

Strict Definition

- Socio-Economic Status
  - Potential: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
  - Actual: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
  - P < 0.9

- Education
  - Potential: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
  - Actual: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
  - P < 0.048

- Political Knowledge
  - Potential: 0.0, 0.5, 1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5, 3.0
  - Actual: 0.0, 0.5, 1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5, 3.0
  - P < 0.009

- Risk Aversion
  - Potential: 0.3, 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.8, 1.0
  - Actual: 0.0, 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.8, 1.0
  - P < 0.92

- Strategic Voting Acceptable (0/1)
  - Potential: 0.3, 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.8, 1.0
  - Actual: 0.0, 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.8, 1.0
  - P < 0.76

- Difference in Feeling Thermometers
  - Potential: -5, 0, 5, 10
  - Actual: -5, 0, 5, 10
  - P < 0.013
Figure 9.3 reproduces the same analysis for respondents who, given their preferences, could have potentially acted strategically in support of Daniel Scioli. The number of potential switchers to Scioli is quite small in the sample. Once again, we find that the difference in the respondent’s feeling thermometer ratings for Scioli and Macri is the most important predictor of strategic behavior, although the difference is statistically significant only when we employ our baseline definition of potentially strategic voters. We find no evidence that any demographic or other characteristic is associated with the likelihood that a potential strategic switcher to Scioli will have actually acted strategically.
Figure 9.3: Comparing Potential and Actual Strategic Voters for Scioli

R1 Strategic Voting Among R2 Scioli Voters

Baseline Definition

Potential vs. Actual: Socio-Economic Status

Potential vs. Actual: Education

Potential vs. Actual: Political Knowledge

Potential vs. Actual: Risk Aversion

Potential vs. Actual: Strategic Voting Acceptable (0/1)

Potential vs. Actual: Difference in Feeling Thermometers

Strict Definition

Potential vs. Actual: Socio-Economic Status

Potential vs. Actual: Education

Potential vs. Actual: Political Knowledge

Potential vs. Actual: Risk Aversion

Potential vs. Actual: Strategic Voting Acceptable (0/1)

Potential vs. Actual: Difference in Feeling Thermometers

Significance Levels: p < 0.58, p < 0.35, p < 0.66, p < 0.35, p < 0.49, p < 0.27, p < 0.75, p < 0.48, p < 0.1, p < 0.27, p < 0.13, p < 0.01, p < 0.23
Table 9.1 presents the results of two logistic regressions that include all these predictors simultaneously. The left column presents results for potentially strategic Macri voters; the outcome takes on a value of one if the respondent actually acted strategically and switched to Macri in the October first-round election; the column on the right presents the same analysis for potentially strategic Scioli voters. Both regressions support the results of the difference-in-means tests presented above; the only significant predictor that distinguishes actual from potential strategic voters is the difference in feeling thermometers towards the two major candidates.

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Standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

53 In both cases, we use the baseline definition of strategic voting.
54 If we use the feeling thermometer score for the less preferred candidate only (i.e., a measure of antipathy toward that candidate), we find similar results.
Discussion

This chapter has offered the first empirical discussion of strategic voting in a Latin American presidential election. We first highlight the incentives for strategic voting under institutional rules that encourage or mandate two-round elections in multiparty systems and elaborate on the ways voters may act strategically in such a setting. Taking advantage of the obligatory open primary and the two-round APES survey during the 2015 Argentine presidential election, we are able to identify strategic voters as those who departed from their true preferences in the first-round October general election, when their choices could have influenced the remaining course of the election. We estimate that between 6 and 10 percent of the electorate acting strategically; this suggests that strategic voting in Argentina in 2015 was about as common as (or slightly more so than) the level that has been observed in previous studies in long-standing wealthy democracies. We also show that a substantial portion (about half) of citizens who, given their preferences, might have voted strategically, actually did so.

Much more work remains on the question of why some voters act strategically while others do not. Our findings in Argentina suggest that, among minor-party supporters, the difference in attitudes towards the major party candidates is the most important determinant of actual strategic voting. In contrast, we find little or no evidence that other individual-level characteristics explain the propensity to vote strategically. As Calvo points out in this volume, the long 2015 electoral cycle in Argentina presented all voters with many opportunities to become knowledgeable about the election and act in a sophisticated fashion. Future work could usefully explore whether certain individual-level characteristics are more important determinants of strategic voting when the population as a whole is somewhat less sophisticated.
Works Cited


